



# Gearing Up For Your Transitions

## Having Friends Can Make Your Life Exciting

*Adapted with permission from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Specialized Care*

Having friends is a way for you to learn to respect yourself and others. It gives you someone to share your ideas, feelings, and experiences with. Your thoughts and feelings about yourself and about others will change as you get to know one another. It's alright. You will learn more about yourself by exploring what you like and don't like in others. It may be tough at times to develop your identity. Being noticed and respected by others is important to us; however remember to be true to yourself and your values.

It is nice to have friends from a variety of backgrounds and groups. This helps you to learn about different people and to develop friends. It's important to know that friendships don't always mean that everyone is getting along. Sometimes friends are happy and agree on almost everything; other times they disagree and want nothing to do with each other.

Joining clubs, groups and teams at school is a good way to make friends that share your interests and likes. You may meet friends at a variety of places like where you work or at a park. Participation in inclusive recreation programs can help you acquire a variety of recreational and social skills.

Smile and say hello to others. Remember people like happy people! Stay positive, smile and do not talk about your problems all the time. When you speak to someone look them in the eyes. Making eye contact is very important when establishing friendships and also remember people's names. Write them down somewhere if you have to so you can look them up if you see them again.

### How To Increase Opportunities To Make Friends

Remember your smile. It is the easiest way to make someone feel comfortable around you. You can practice a lead in sentence when you approach someone new.

Start your conversation by smiling and say, "Hi, My name is \_\_\_\_\_." They will usually speak back to you telling you their name. Then ask polite questions about them which, is a great way to learn about someone and look for common interests that build friendships.

Allowing others to talk about themselves is a good way for you to help others feel important and valued. An example of polite questions could be:

**Talking to a new person:** "How are you today? " "Isn't the weather (whatever the weather is doing) amazing?" "It's raining hard outside. Isn't it nice to be indoors?"

**Talking to a person in school:** “What did you think of that test?” “Did you go to the game last night?” “Are you going to the dance?” “I am interested in \_\_\_\_\_ (pick a school club or activity). How do I get involved?”

**Talking to a person at work:** “I am not sure I understand how to do that, can you explain it to me?” “How long have you worked here?” “Do you like your job?”

Set a goal to talk to one new person every day. It could be at school, work, at the grocery store or park. There are a lot of opportunities to meet and speak to others.

Volunteering in your local community is a great way to meet new people and have some fun with others.

Joining a support group is a great way to meet new people and develop friends. Special recreation programs and health condition-specific summer camps are places where youth with special needs can meet and make new friends.

The thing about making friends is, you have to be honest and kind. It takes time to get to know one another. Be patient with others and yourself.

Some people will be interested in learning about you. They may ask questions about your disability. It is okay to share as much information about yourself as you are comfortable with.

Tell someone you like the color of their hair or the shoes or clothes they wear. Be careful not to make someone feel uncomfortable by making comments about their physical appearance or attributes; especially those of the opposite sex. In the beginning stages of your friendship, you could invite them for a walk or out to lunch or to do something fun.

Keeping friends is sometimes not easy. Remember that friends need space and time by themselves. The best way to make new friends and keep your old ones is to be a good listener, get along well with others, and be a friendly person.